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The difficulties attending a juſt explanation of ſcripture conſidered, as they have ariſen from the gradual progreſs of Revealed Religion through a length of time:

A

SERMON

PREACHED AT

ST. MARY'S,

AT THE

VISITATION,

HELD BY

THE REVEREND

THE ARCHDEACON OF OXFORD,

OCTOBER 24. 1780.

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M DCC LXXXI.

IMPRIMATUR,

S. DENNIS,

VICE-CAN. OXON.

Nov. 25. 1780.

2 Tim. II. 15.

STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH.

SAINT Paul, among the various and important leſſons, which he gives his ſon and fellow labourer in the ſecond epiſtle addreſſed to him, lays a peculiar ſtreſs on the miniſterial duty in ſkilfully explaining the word of truth; — in pointing out it's true ſpirit and deſign, and vindicating the divine wiſdom from the miſrepreſentations of ignorance or prejudice.

THE delivering theſe inſtructions to Timothy may be conſidered as the concluding act of the great apoſtle's commiſſion. He was now for the laſt [a] time in bonds, he had been deſerted by his former diſciples and friends, "he was ready to be offered [b]," and the time of his departure from this worldly ſcene was at

[a] 2 Tim. 2, 9. [b] 2 Tim. 4, 6.

hand. In this ſituation he conſidered what were the moſt uſeful admonitions he could leave mankind; and he hath evidently given the preference to ſuch as relate to the great duties of the miniſtry, by employing on them his lateſt thoughts, and concluding there the important and ſublime leſſons which proceeded from his inſpired pen.

THEY doubtleſs, who have engaged in that arduous work, ſhould receive the laſt inſtructions of ſuch a maſter with ſuitable deference and attention. They ſhould "bind them about the neck, and write "them on the tables of the heart." Particularly, they ſhould ſet before them the ſtreſs that he lays on the knowledge of the ſcriptures, and their able and juſt explanation.

ERROR, at all times dangerous, muſt be eminently ſo, when enforced and recommended under the ſanction of ſacred authority. If the light of revelation be darkneſs, how great will be that darkneſs!

IT is to be obſerved alſo, that the apoſtle doth not ſuppoſe this true interpretation, this "form of wholſome words," and of "ſound doctrine," to be ſo ready and

obvious as we at preſent too willingly conceive it. On the contrary, he repreſents it as being converſant in matters of great extent, and often, of myſterious depth; which were eaſily miſrepreſented, and had even in his time, given riſe to many falſe opinions and doctrines.—Yet inſpiration had not then ceaſed; the authors of the ſacred volume of the new teſtament were ready to illuſtrate their own writings; the facts and proofs alluded to, were freſh and flouriſhing; and the difficulties that great diſtance of time and place, that difference of cuſtoms and manners; that the enemies, and, I may add, the friends, of chriſtianity have introduced, could then have no exiſtence.

When we conſider the diſadvantages in theſe ſeveral reſpects that we are ſubject to at preſent, we ſhall have many arguments for ſuperior diligence and application: which will receive additional weight, if we reflect what induſtry and abilities are daily exerted to miſrepreſent the ſacred writings, and to fix on them any charge of error or inconſiſtency.

The natural principles of the human mind may ſufficiently account for attempts of this nature. It's vanity has ever been unwilling to receive the dictates even

even of an unerring guide; and it hath in all ages been eaſily led aſtray by the flattering notion of ſetting up new opinions, or of deſtroying ſuch as it finds eſtabliſhed.

It is not ſurprizing that ſuch principles ſhould avail themſelves of whatever revelation, from it's very nature and eſſence, or from it's peculiar circumſtances, contains in it myſterious and obſcure. Nor is it more to be wondered at, that the advocates of error ſhould want fairneſs and candour in ſtating their objections; ſince erroneous opinions are to be recommended only by the arts of ſophiſtry and impoſition.

As the application of thoſe principles of rational criticiſm, which are employed in the explanation of other writings of antiquity, has ever been found the moſt effectual method of ſilencing objectors and defending the ſcriptures; ſacred criticiſm in all it's branches becomes an important object to miniſters of the goſpel; that they may be enabled to extort by conviction that juſtice for their cauſe, which they cannot expect from the fairneſs and good diſpoſitions of their adverſaries.

THERE are many conſiderations drawn from this place and audience that may well excuſe me from pointing out each particular ſpecies of learning ſubſervient to this end. I ſhall rather attempt to lay down in the following diſcourſe ſome general principles, by means of which many difficulties may, I think, be accounted for, if not removed.

IT is of uſe to conſider the ſame ſubject in different points of view. Some underſtandings find more ſatisfaction in tracing truths upward to their firſt grounds; others proceed with greater caution, and having firſt obtained eſtabliſhed and general principles, readily deduce from them other truths and concluſions.

ON the preſent occaſion I ſhall purſue the latter method, and conſider how far ſome of the chief difficulties of ſacred criticiſm may be deduced from the following principles.

FIRST, it ſhall be my object to ſhew, that the ſcriptures, being calculated to promote the progreſſive plan of revelation, at the ſame time that they declare the great and univerſal truths relating to belief and practice, muſt unavoidably be ſubject to

many circumſtances, that render their explanation difficult and intricate.

WHICH difficulties, as I ſhall (ſecondly) obſerve, A great length of time hath to us much encreaſed, while it hath added others, nearly as important, and immediately ariſing from itſelf.

I. IT ſhall be my object to ſhew, that the ſcriptures, being calculated to promote the progreſſive plan of revelation, at the ſame time that they declare the great and univerſal truths relating to belief and practice, muſt unavoidably be ſubject to many circumſtances, that render their explanation difficult and intricate.

IT may be obſerved in every part of the natural or moral world, that perfection is never inſtantaneouſly arrived at; nothing is at once brought to it's final and compleat ſtate. Whether we take a view of the general œconomy of nature, or conſider the hiſtory of human occurrences; whether we obſerve the growth of a body, or the improvement of a mind, we find proofs of a beginning, and of ſubſequent progreſs and advancement.

THE

THE ſame law, it is preſumed, obtains with reſpect to revelation. We may obſerve it's dawn and firſt appearances among a particular people; and can trace the further opening of the ſcene, 'till the clear day of the goſpel had fully diſplayed it. We muſt therefore expect obſcurity under the moſaic diſpenſation. The light of revelation had then but begun to riſe and diſpenſe it's divine influence. "The GOD of "Iſrael was verily a GOD that hid himſelf." He did not then declare all things with that clearneſs which we are bleſſed with: ſo much only was revealed, as was neceſſary to the opening of the great ſcheme of redemption. The reſt is often involved in awful myſtery; as mount Sinai, when the law was given, was covered with "thick clouds, with ſmoke and dark-"neſs [c]."

THE writings containing this revelation, were deſigned in later times, for general uſe, and not meant to be confined to the people who were originally favoured with them. The known characteriſtic of this people was that of unſociableneſs, of being precluded by their religious and legal ſyſtems from any intercourſe with other nations. "They were ſeparated," as Moſes [d] declares,

[c] Exod. 19. Heb. 12.

[d] Exod. 33. 16.

declares, "from all the people that were upon the face "of the earth." This circumſtance muſt give occaſion to great obſcurities in every thing that regarded the language, the laws and cuſtoms, the geography, and hiſtory, of ſuch a nation, when their ſcriptures were communicated to others.

It might be eaſy to apply this more fully, and to ſhew what obſcurities have ariſen from the ſcriptures of the old teſtament having been deſigned for particular purpoſes, and calculated for a particular people, while they were at the ſame time meant to anſwer the general end of opening the minds of men for the reception of the Chriſtian ſcheme, and are ſtill intended to contribute to it's advancement.

I choose however to confine myſelf in the remainder of this diſcourſe to the conſideration of the principles laid down, as they neceſſarily affect the writings of the new teſtament.

The firſt covenant, as it was only the opening of a more extenſive plan, and intimately blended with the civil and moral inſtitutions, the rites and ceremonies, and the hiſtory, of a particular people, circumſtanced

ſtanced as I have mentioned, muſt unavoidably be embarraſſed with many difficulties.

THE chriſtian ſcheme was that perfection and reality itſelf, to which the former had been only an introduction: it was not meant to be confined to any nation, but deſigned for the information and redemption of all mankind. "This promiſe," ſaith the apoſtle [e], "is unto you and to your children, and to all "that are afar off." Yet it is manifeſt that the ſcriptures which contain the truths of this divine ſyſtem, bear ſtrong marks of the people among whom it had it's origin. Even the plaineſt of our Lord's diſcourſes are full of alluſions to the particular rites, laws, and hiſtory of judaiſm.

IT was alſo determined by the unſearchable wiſdom of the Almighty, that this religion although ſo general and comprehenſive in it's deſign, ſhould not ſuddenly ſpread itſelf over the earth; but that it ſhould advance gradually; and continue for a length of time to perform it's ſalutary work, by methods of rational perſuaſion and conviction.

[e] Acts 2. 39.

IT is accordingly natural to expect that the writings which record it's truths, and which promoted it's progreſs, ſhould correſpond with theſe principles, and be modelled in conformity to them.

THE books of the new teſtament are therefore not only to be regarded as the repoſitories of the general doctrines and principles of chriſtianity, but alſo as calculated in their ſeveral ways to promote it's progreſs according to the plan of providence. This circumſtance it is evident will introduce into them a great variety of matter, and ſometimes even give riſe to apparent inconſiſtencies. From the ſtrict agreement obſerveable in eſſentials, amidſt this variety, there ariſe ſtrong arguments againſt all ſuſpicion of forgery or fraud, and preſumptions in favour of general inſpiration, and good faith in the writers: at the ſame time there is opened a plentiful ſource of criticiſm, for thoſe whoſe particular duty it is *to explain and defend the word of truth.*

MANY variations may be accounted for, and many obſcurities cleared up, by reſolving them into the principle mentioned. Thus, for inſtance, as the plan of the goſpel was progreſſive, it unavoidably began

gan with particular communities and nations. Hence much will occur that was meant more particularly for them; and many things be found, of a local, peculiar, and occaſional nature.

SAINT Matthew's goſpel ſeems calculated more eſpecially for a Hebrew reader; as does ſaint Mark's for a Roman, if we may judge from it's having been written at Rome, and from the omiſſion of many circumſtances leſs intelligible to the Gentiles, and the inſertion of others for their information, which it was not neceſſary for ſaint Matthew to mention[f]. Saint Luke it is believed wrote his goſpel in Egypt, and there are many paſſages in it that appear intended more eſpecially for the uſe of the Chriſtians ſettled there[g].

MOST of the epiſtles were deſigned for the circumſtances and emergencies of particular congregations; and ſome even adapted to the caſes of individuals; of which kind are thoſe addreſſed to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Why this attention was paid to particular ſocieties or to individuals; or why theſe

[f] Grotius, in Evang. Marci, 291, 293. Michaelis's Lectures, 230.
[g] Millii Proleg.

truths

truths were addreſſed to ſuch perſons rather than to any others, I do not enquire: let it ſuffice to have obſerved, that ſuch diſtinctions were made, and that they eſſentially belong to the progreſſive plan here laid down.

But the works ſpoken of, are alſo of general and permanent uſe. Hence will ariſe an intermixture of general and particular matter, and employment for judgment and criticiſm in ſeparating them.

In the ſame manner much was introduced into ſcripture on account of the oppoſition to chriſtianity during the firſt periods of it's progreſs. Much was occaſioned alſo by the miſtaken zeal and want of judgment of friends, as well as by the malice and miſrepreſentation of enemies. It became neceſſary to inform and reſtrain the one, as well as to detect and expoſe the other.

Hence a knowledge of the diſputes and hereſies that diſturbed the firſt Chriſtians is of great utility; ſince many paſſages are by that means alone to be explained and limited to their true ſenſe.

Thus

THUS, it is known, that one leading view of ſaint John in his goſpel, and in the firſt of his epiſtles, was to confute the errors of Cerinthus. Saint Paul might frequently ſeem to condemn all human learning[h], did we not attend to the particular miſapplications, and abuſes of it that he points at: after the ſame manner the apparently diſagreeing opinions of different writers, as of ſaint Paul[i] and ſaint James[k], are to be explained and reconciled.

AS the divine wiſdom has thought fit to accomodate the *matter* of the ſacred writings to the progreſſive plan of chriſtianity in theſe and many other inſtances; ſo hath it likewiſe modelled the *ſtyles*, and *manners of expreſſion* of the ſeveral writers, to the ſame deſign.

THE ſcriptures of the new teſtament contained every argument that could apply to particular occaſions, and peculiar emergencies: that was proper to convince and improve readers of every ſtamp and diſpoſition.

[h] See 1 Cor. 1. 19, 20. Col. 2. 8. 1 Tim. 6. 20, and other paſſages in thoſe epiſtles, where the apoſtle ſometimes means to expoſe the viſions of the oriental, ſometimes to repreſs the vanity of the Grecian Philoſophy; and often to ſhew the ill uſe that was made of their knowledge by the learned Jews.

[i] Rom. 3; 28. 5; 1. [k] St. James 2; 14, 17, 21.

They offered reaſoning to the learned objector, as well as precept and conſolation to the candid believer.

In like manner, although the inſpired writers, ſaint Matthew excepted [1], uſed the ſame then univerſal language, the features and peculiarities of their ſeveral ſtyles are very various and diſtinguiſhable; and calculated to produce their effect on perſons of different characters and capacities.

On ſome a ſhort and pointed turn of expreſſion has it's influence and carries conviction more rapidly and deciſively: others are ſlow of apprehenſion, muſt dwell on their ſubject, have it turned before them and placed in every different point of view. Many require the greateſt plaineſs and ſimplicity of language, as well as of matter: others, who are uſed to works of learning, are more wrought on by elegancies of ſtyle, and more willingly receive inſtruction, when conveyed through the medium of juſt compoſition or figurative turns of expreſſion.

While ſuch a degree of plaineſs and perſpicuity reigns in the ſacred writers as may render them of general utility, it will appear on the ſlighteſt obſerva-

[1] Grotius in Matt. 4.

tion,

tion, that there is a material difference in their ſtyles and manners, ſuited to the characters mentioned, and deſigned to promote the progreſs of the goſpel, by recommending it's truths with greater perſuaſion and effect.

IT may be obſerved that the tranſlator of ſaint Matthew's goſpel has written in a ſimple, and copious ſtyle; and that the narration is remarkably full and circumſtantial. Saint Mark, on the contrary, is fond of a ſhorter turn of expreſſion; and only ſelects the principal and moſt ſtriking circumſtances; ſo that his goſpel has been conſidered, however improperly, as the abridgment of that of ſaint Matthew; or as a ſummary of the obſervations made by ſaint Peter [m].

IN the greater purity and elegance of ſaint Luke's ſtyle, we acknowledge traces of a liberal education. A venerable plaineſs and ſimplicity of language, and an affinity to the Syriac idiom, have been pointed out as characterizing the writings of ſaint John. He is diffuſe in his manner, is fond of dwelling on his ſubject, of repeating his inſtructions, and of preſent-them in every poſſible light. It has been obſerved that his goſpel and epiſtles are written in purer lan-

[m] Millii proleg. Michaelis's Lectures, 228, 229.

guage

guage than the revelation; a change of ſtyle that has been very ingeniouſly and reaſonably accounted for, from his long reſidence in a Greek city, in the interval, between his writing the revelation, and compoſing his goſpel; which laſt he is believed to have written as a ſupplement to the other goſpels, and in a very advanced age[n].

SAINT Paul hath impreſſed on his writings the ſtrongeſt marks of his having been the moſt learned of the apoſtles. He abounds in metaphorical alluſion, and is maſter of every figurative turn of ſpeech. We acknowledge the apoſtle of the Gentiles, the more learned and poliſhed nations of the world, in the variety of his knowledge, and the ſublimity of his ſtyle. Sometimes he convinces by a long and regular train of argument; ſometimes he overturns all oppoſition by the powers of his eloquence.

THIS variety of ſtyle will neceſſarily preſent us with matter to exerciſe our induſtry and application, in acquiring the characters of the ſeveral manners; and in drawing the beſt information from the original language, compared with the dialects of thoſe countries where the writers chiefly reſided.

[n] Sir Iſ. Newton on the Apocalypſe. p. 238. Millii Proleg.

AT

AT the ſame time, it furniſhes a conſiderable trial of our judgment and diſcretion. Some have entirely buſied themſelves in diſcovering elegancies and beauties of compoſition, neglecting the great truths with which the divine ſpirit hath ſo richly adorned it's productions. Others have been perhaps too ſtudious to illuſtrate the phraſe and language from paſſages in the claſſical writings of the pureſt age of Greece, to which the ſacred language does not always bear a ſtrict analogy. Others again, have indulged themſelves in the unpardonable liberty of treating the ſtyle of the inſpired writers with diſreſpect, and taxing it with impurities and barbariſms.

WHILE we conſider every thing that relates to theſe books, with that awful reverence, that the importance of their ſubject, and the dignity of their origin demand; let us not value the inſtrument by which we gain admiſſion to ineſtimable treaſures, above thoſe treaſures themſelves; but let us be more ſtudious to explain and enforce the doctrines of the divine writings, than to "ſtrive about words, often "to no profit, but rather to the ſubverting of the "hearers."

ANOTHER important occaſion of difficulty in explaining the books of the new teſtament, and which may be claſſed under this head, ariſes from the evidences of prophecy, which thoſe writings, as the other ſcriptures had done, carry with them; and which gradually unfolding themſelves ſupport the cauſe, and aſſiſt the progreſs of revelation.

THE application of prophecy, is neceſſarily a matter of great nicety and judgment: requiring alſo extenſive learning and long acquaintance with the prophetic ſtyle and manner. Particularly, where prophecies, as is obſerveable often in the new teſtament, are blended and incorporated with other ſubjects. The wonderful agreement of events as they have ſprung up, with the prophecies thus left us as ſacred pledges of the truth of the goſpel, have ſufficiently explained to us the reaſons of the divine œconomy in this reſpect.

II. IF the cauſes aſſigned were ſufficient to introduce obſcurities in the earlieſt period; a great length of time hath at preſent heightened every former difficulty, while it hath added others nearly as important, and immediately ariſing from itſelf. The conſideration of theſe was the ſecond object I had in view.

A JUST

A JUST knowledge of the laws, cuſtoms and manners of foreign nations, is even to their contemporaries a matter of great ſtudy and attention. It is unneceſſary to obſerve how much more judgment as well as induſtry will be required, when theſe laws and cuſtoms have ſo long, in a great meaſure, ceaſed to have any exiſtence but in deſcription. In theſe reſpects therefore, and in all circumſtances affecting the hiſtory of nations, every former difficulty has been encreaſed by time, while new ones have ariſen *immediately* from the ſame cauſe.

THE divine wiſdom, having at the time it thought expedient, withdrawn the gift of inſpiration and ſealed the ſacred volume; it ſoon became the grand object of the Chriſtian church to draw the line, and to aſcertain with preciſion, what ſhould be judged to be the genuine work of the ſpirit, and what ſhould be admitted as uſeful to explain the ſacred writings, but not received as of equal authority.

THE canon of ſcripture was at length ſettled on the cleareſt evidence, and the ſtrongeſt proofs of the genuineneſs of the ſeveral writings were laid up for the uſe of future ages. Such, I mean, as reſult from the

the atteſtation of the great number of tranſcripts of the original; of ancient verſions into the principal languages, which were diſperſed through the moſt diſtant countries; of citations of many parts of the new teſtament occurring in the writings of the firſt fathers; and of early teſtimonies of antient authors both Jewiſh and Heathen.

Such evidences having been by the divine care treaſured up, which the diſcretion and induſtry of future ages, might call forth and avail themſelves of, the dark period of ignorance and ſuperſtition ſucceeded. During this the knowledge of the ſacred writings, received little cultivation. Yet a ſtrong argument of the genuineſs of thoſe writings, as we now poſſeſs them, may be derived from the hiſtory of thoſe times. The oracles ° of the old teſtament were committed to the Jews, as unſuſpicious guardians of thoſe ſcriptures by which themſelves were condemned. In the ſame manner many of the acknowledged manuſcripts of the Greek teſtament, and ſome of the moſt reſpectable verſions, were entruſted to the church of Rome; which may, had we no other evidence of their genuineſs, be hence conceived to have

° Rom. 3. 2.

come

come down to us without any eſſential corruption; ſince every page condemns the principles and doctrines of that church, to whoſe keeping theſe books had been delivered, and which, as the Jews had done, was ignorantly fulfilling the prophecies that it thus preſerved.

When the ſhades of ignorance were diſpelled on the revival of letters, divine knowledge had it's ſhare of cultivation; and as editions and verſions of the ſcriptures at large, and of thoſe of the new teſtament in particular, appeared at different times, new manuſcripts were gradually brought out to public notice.

The number of various readings which a length of time has accumulated, hath turned men's thoughts more earneſtly to examine the ſtate of the Greek text, and to endeavour to reduce it to the greateſt certainty. This ſtudy has introduced a ſpecies of critical learning, which hath not only furniſhed extraordinary evidences for aſcertaining the true readings; but hath likewiſe by rendering the ſacred language and mode of expreſſion more familiar, made it's meaning more ob-

vious and intelligible. From hence freſh matter will be ſupplied to exerciſe our diligence, and to call us to a frequent and ſcrupulous examination of the word of truth. With which view it hath doubtleſs been thus ordered by providence. Theſe works might elſe have been conveyed to us by miraculous interpoſition, without any variation. But the divine wiſdom hath thought fit to try our patience and induſtry in this reſpect, as it hath our faith and ſubmiſſion by the obſcurities which it hath ſcattered in revelation, and our virtue and firmneſs, by the dangers and temptations that morality is ſubject to.

It muſt in every inſtance be a matter of importance to fix the ſacred text in its genuine incorrupt form: But particularly where objections to any doctrine have been grounded on various readings; or where attempts have been made to weaken the authority of the inſpired text, by repreſenting it as vague and indeterminate. Much is owing on this account to the labours of the preſent age. Works of extenſive learning and judgment, have been conſtructed, which have vindicated

cated the ſcriptures of the new teſtament from every charge of uncertainty that can be brought againſt them; and have reduced the text to ſufficient ſtability and preciſion. Rules have been propoſed, for appreciating the various readings, from the number, age, and good faith of the ſeveral manuſcripts, from the concurring proofs of citations in the early fathers, and frequently from the oldeſt verſions; ſome of which it is known are of moſt reſpectable antiquity. A circumſtance this, which the ſacred writings enjoy above any works that have come down to us; few if any of which, have been authenticated or illuſtrated, by tranſlations that are at all to be regarded on account of their age.

BESIDES theſe methods of aſcertaining the genuine readings, much ingenious criticiſm has been founded on the abbreviations often occurring in antient manuſcripts; the breaking of the text into words; the diviſion into chapters; the more modern diſtinction of verſes; the explanatory additions of accents and breathings; and, in general, on all the ſuppoſitions uſually recurred to, in reforming the text of antient Greek writers.

It is neceſſary that we ſhould be informed on theſe ſubjects of criticiſm, in an age when unleſs we are able to uſe theſe arms in the cauſe of religion, they will be ſeized by a dangerous enemy and be employed againſt that fortreſs which they are ſo well calculated to defend. For in fact, the critical knowledge introduced by the circumſtance of various readings, has held forth lights to us, in tracing the conveyance of the books of the new teſtament down to our times, which would probably not elſe have been enjoyed; at the ſame time that it hath given a facility and ſkill in illuſtrating the ſcriptural ſtyle, and, I may add, hath imparted the moſt effectual means of ſtating with preciſion, and defending with learning, the ſacred text.

Yet theſe divine writings are not to be treated with the boldneſs of conjecture, that ſome have ventured to apply to them. The text of ſcripture is not to be cut and pared to our purpoſe with as little remorſe as ſome editors have ſhewn, in mutilating and deforming the moſt beautiful works of antiquity. The greateſt moderation founded on an high ſenſe of the importance and dignity of the ſubject, ſhould govern us in our attempts of clearing or illuſtrating in this manner the word of truth.

On what has been obſerved I ſhall ground the following reflections; — It may appear from this general view of our ſubject, that the explanation of ſcripture is not ſo eaſy, and light a matter as ſome are too apt to conceive it: but that it requires thought, and reflection, and frequently deep and extenſive learning.

Almighty God hath not thought fit to make his revelation in every part of it alike plain and obvious; or to laviſh every degree of divine knowledge on the ſupine and indolent. He has under the firſt revelation of his will to mankind, often deemed it expedient to withdraw his counſels from the vulgar eye, to wrap up divine leſſons in myſterious alluſions, "to open his mouth in a parable "and to utter dark ſayings of old[p]." Nor are even the ſcriptures of the new teſtament, though they afford ſo ſtrong and glorious a light, void of difficulty, or equally clear and intelligible throughout. — The deſign of which is to animate our induſtry and application. —That we may provide ourſelves with means proper for acquiring knowledge of ſuch great worth, that our ardour may be heightened by the difficulties we meet with,—that we may "long for the

[p] Pſ. 78. 2.

"divine precepts[q];—that we may "ſeek them as ſilver, "and dig for them as for hid treaſures[r]:"— and that by frequent and deep reflection on the ſenſe of ſcripture, we may become more perfect maſters of it ourſelves, and declare it with greater certainty and readineſs to others.

NOR can this ſtudy be thought dry and ungrateful: I mean even detached from the true ſatisfaction of performing a duty, or the pleaſure which the mind muſt ever receive from meditations on divine ſubjects. The ſcriptures in a higher degree perhaps than any other compoſitions, preſent us with ſpecimens of every conceivable excellence and beauty: while they convey whatever ideas of grandeur and majeſty, of ſublimity and elevation, the mind of man is capable of receiving; while they raiſe every emotion of pity, terror, and ſurprize, they abound in the fineſt repreſentations of the ſofter and more tender affections, and are not without the graces, and finiſhed beauties of compoſition.

BUT theſe conſiderations ſupply motives of an inferior kind.—The importance of the duty to ourſelves, and to others; the danger of neglecting it in this

[q] Pſ. 119. 40. [r] Proverbs. 2. 4.

age;

age; the dread, and even the example of infidelity, ſhould animate and alarm us.

Let us obſerve with what diligence and art, the poiſon is prepared: what zeal is ſhewn in diſperſing it. Let us confeſs with ſhame that "the children of this "world, are in their generation, wiſer, and more la- "borious than the children of light." Let us then, endeavour thus far to imitate them; and by a judicious explanation and defence of the ſcriptures, be ready to remove thoſe doubts and ſcruples, which are ſo eagerly ſpread, and which, when unſatisfied, will not fail to leave a melancholy impreſſion, and give a wrong bias and turn to a whole life.—The brighteſt talents, and the moſt extenſive learning cannot be made ſubſervient to ſo noble and benevolent an end, as that of eſtabliſhing men in their religious opinions, and confirming them in the truth; nor will any exertions of the powers of the human mind, meet with ſo diſtinguiſhed a reward hereafter.